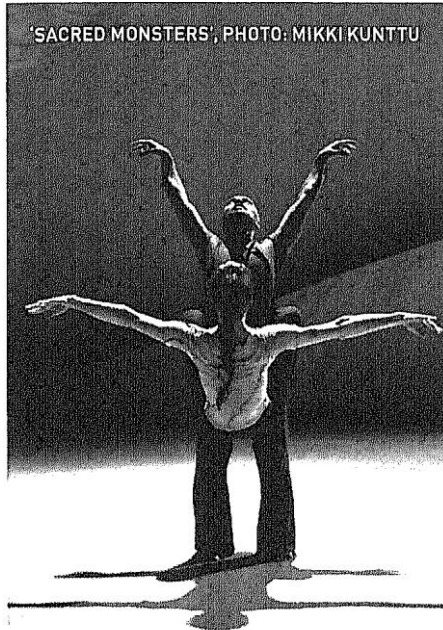


# POSTSCRIPT - INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL 2008

Wellington

22 February - 16 March 2008

The dance selection at the 2008 New Zealand International Arts Festival was entirely as promised, with extraordinary performances from superb dance artists and eleven



productions covering the dance-physical, theatre-dance, and theatre-cirque spectrum, collectively fulfilling the mandate to present us with experiences which are beyond those normally available locally.

The programme offered a representative array of the best dance productions currently on the international festival circuit. Works ranged from the purest of pure dance set to gloriously live music, Tero Saarinen & Company accompanied by the Boston Camerata in the exquisitely absorbing 'Borrowed Light', and technology-based solo performance installation, Chunky Move's 'Glow', to east-west music-dance-design fusion, Shen Wei Dance Arts in 'Rite of Spring' and 'Folding'. Superstar dancers explored shared territories, Sylvie Guillem and Akram Khan in Sacred Monsters. There was family-friendly cirque, 'Traces' by Les Sept Doigts de la Main, and Johann Le Guillerm in 'Cirque Ici', a theatre work with some dependence on dance, Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre's very much updated 'Giselle', and visceral dance theatre in the politically charged 'Honour Bound' produced by Nigel Jamieson with choreography by Garry Stewart. There was never a shortage of issues to talk about after the show.

There is not enough space here to report on the many aspects or instances to marvel at and luxuriate in, or wish to see again: neither is there room to adequately discuss the matters one would wish to puzzle over and pick apart. Hybridisation continues to be the primary trend, not just in terms of the complementary

intermixing of disparate styles of movement, which has of course long been de rigueur in choreography of all kinds, but also in terms of stories updated to another period for which analogues are offered ('Giselle'), or in which personal stories and personalities are also combined ('Sacred Monsters'). Mythic and spiritual traditions are also examined in 'Borrowed Light' and 'Folding', and scenographic aesthetics are intermixed in 'Glow' and 'Honour Bound'. Need an example of where it fails horribly, otherwise the claim is not substantiated!!

Dances dominated by their 'look' and choreographed to look like visual art works is the second continuing trend here - these are after all well-funded, large scale works created for grand presentation. Shen Wei is a master of this striking yet apparently simply achieved pictorial look. His 'Rite of Spring' was all black, white and greys, with the dancing surface akin to a giant game board whose markings mutated in the course of the dance. His 'Folding' was dominated by a hand painted version of an 18th century Chinese watercolour as the backcloth, dwarfing the performers who were sheathed and painted to look something like cone-headed aliens from Star Trek Voyager. 'Sacred Monsters' was a gleaming white gallery space with a diagonally slashed backcloth of white crumpled linen paper (design by Shizuka Hariu), that at times was backlit against grey or erased by black (lighting by Mikki Kunttu).

For 'Borrowed Light', design accolades must go to Mikki Kunttu (lighting and set) and Erika Turunen (costumes), whose designs were revelatory and inspiring. Nine dancers and nine singers were continuously present throughout the work, the singers variously positioned on benches and ramps, and everyone wearing layers of black clothing which appeared spartan and plain until pierced by light that revealed intricate designs. Judicious use of lighting, combined with the re-arrangement of bodies in space, managed to present a dozen or so different interiors of a Shaker community house without any physical alteration to the set.

An increasing use of contemporary technologies for effective scenographic effect must also be noted. The intimately scaled, exquisitely intense, solo interactive installation 'Glow', from Chunky Move (Australia), uses Frieder Weib's Calypso software to intermix lighting, sound and projected imagery which change in response to the dancer's movements. Also from Australia, 'Honour Bound' made striking use of interactive multimedia to present an ever-unfurling Geneva Declaration of Human Rights documentary as the backdrop for an aerially supported performer running to stay in place, on his feet, to conjure the Sisyphean efforts which prisoners in Guantanamo Bay face in their unending demands for release.

Raewyn Whyte

# WOMEN AND HONOUR: NOTES ON LYING

Clare Luiten

Cold Harbour Dance

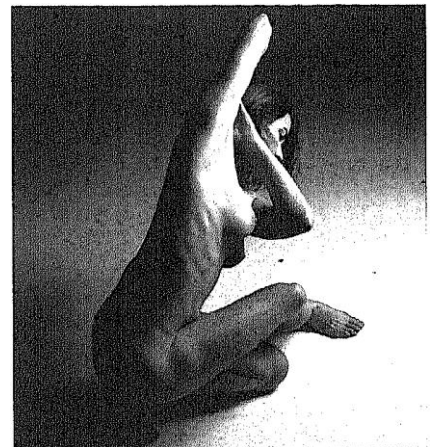
Concert Chamber, Auckland

15-17 February 2008

'Women and Honour: Notes on Lying' had four creative collaborators including choreographer Clare Luiten. Charlotte Rose produced an atmospheric music score, which enhanced the work admirably, likewise for the pools of light designed by Sean Curran.

Four dancers in this piece included three very differently characterised females, Clare Luiten, Kerry McMurdoo and Tallulah Massey, all dressed differently in contrast to the egocentric shallow male danced by Matt Gibbons.

An initial image that struck me was the male, on all-fours, transporting a female dancer standing on his back slowly across the upstage, and to my right, down stage, the light exposes another female dancer lying down face up, odd angled. This pose was somewhat unsettling and she maintained it for a considerable time. What lies do these two images portray I asked myself having read the programme note earlier informing me this work is inspired by American writer and poet Adrienne Rich's 1977 feminist essay 'Women and Honor: Some notes on Lying'.



I found Clare Luiten's extended solo interesting to watch, especially how it translated onto her body giving a chiselled sculptural spatial emphasis.

At another point the movement built to a very physical duet, the device of touch and go increased the intensity only to be interrupted by a loud physical slap in sharp contrast to further on in the piece, when a woman is being likened to a Chevy car, 1957 version to be precise, with original upholstery. A classic with original headlights! A car always seems to have a female identity and this one was no exception, still glitzy and in good order.

This piece ended satisfactorily with images of the beginning recurring. However I did not think this piece delivered overall in terms of depth; there is far more to be mined from this idea than was realised and I hope Clare gains the opportunity to revisit and deepen it.

Sue Cheesman